

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 091

CS 004 518

AUTHOR Jansen, Mogens
TITLE The Development in Reading from 1934 to 1976.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association World Congress on Reading (7th, Hamburg, West Germany, August 1-3, 1978); Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Reading; *Educational Change; *Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Library Programs; *Reading Achievement; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Research; *Social Change

IDENTIFIERS *Denmark

ABSTRACT

This document reviews the changes in reading in Denmark from 1934 to 1976 and discusses factors that brought about the changes. The paper indicates the importance of the library in reading development and notes that children use the library more extensively today than they did earlier. Changes in society and their effects on the educational system and on reading instruction are mentioned. The paper concludes by suggesting that study and research on reading in Denmark can be illuminated by further historical research and by consideration of the experience of other countries.
(TJ)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED165091

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.



The Danish Institute
for Educational
Research

28 Hermodsgade
DK 2200
Copenhagen N

Denmark

Phone
Internat:
+451810140

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SEVENTH WORLD CONGRESS ON READING
August 1-3, 1978, Hamburg

Tuesday, August 1, 1978.
1100 - 1215

The Development in Reading from 1934 to 1976
=====

Speaker: Mogens Jansen, Denmark

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Mogens Jansen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND
USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

CS004518

1

The Development in Reading from 1934-1976.

My subject is "The Development in Reading from 1934-1976".

I ought to start myself with the criticism, which in any case will appear:

1) Why speak about reading only? - what about all the other parts of teaching? - for instance verbal presentation? - written presentation? - spelling etc.?

Of course this is a reading congress, and of course reading is important. But there are other things within language and education, which decidedly need training. The fact is that exactly within the reading field there were some concrete bases, which might form the basis of this review.

2) Why choose exactly the fortytwo years between 1934 and 1976?

Well, I might answer that since I come from the old world, it will be reasonable that I start 10 years earlier than Dr. Fay. But asking seriously: "Why exactly 1934-1976?"

Again the answer will be: There was a documented material, covering a.o. approximately this period. By the way the central point of the review is the period from 1950 to 1976.

3) However, the most essential point of criticism is: "Where in the world did this investigation take place?"

For it must be attached to some place or other in or outside the English-speaking world? I shall return to that.

My presentation will consist of five items:

- 1) What has happened
in reading during these years?
- 2) Why did it happen?
- 3) Knowledge may also be obtained
from the library!
- 4) Society was different,
- and will become different?
- 5) "Now, what can we learn
from this story?"

1) What has happened in reading during these years?

Criticism of school's results

Also in Denmark there is a persistent current criticism of students' skills within their mothertongue (Danish).

The criticism comes from two groups:

Partly from people, who believe that everything was better, when they themselves were young - "even the teachers are getting younger and younger!"

- partly from people, who are aware of the fact that new professions 'swallows' many of the best students, while the traditional professions often will have to recruit new personnel from groups, which may be academically less well equipped.

The attitude of the average Dane probably is that "... possibly the students have learned other things than their parents have - for instance children of today are generally more skilled in the first foreign language, English, than we were a generation ago." - "But what about reading (and spelling)?"

Reading of the 7-14 year-old past and present

When in 1977, 4(1) the Læsepædagogen ("The Reading Teacher" published a comparative survey of, how students read and spell, it created a great deal of interest in the public.

The collection of material was partly decided by the location of previous collections; testing is used very little in Denmark - mainly just by a few teachers and in some administrative areas plus (of course) at diagnosing for special education.

A total of a little more than 20.000 silent-reading tests from grade 2 to grade 7, about 1000 oral-reading tests from grades 2 - 4 were collected. The fact that the silent-reading tests outnumber the oral-reading tests reflects the fact that the interest in using the silent-reading tests has been predominant.

Results from 1970-75 have been compared to standards of 1966, 1957, 1950 (and to a limited extent to 1933/34).

The tests were spread across extremely different administrative areas - so different that any fortuitousness in results must be out of the question.

A characteristic of today and probably an important detail should be noticed: It is characteristic for the uncertainty in the local attitude towards the children's abilities in the mothertongue that no difficulties occurred in establishing contacts with school psychologists, reading consultants, etc. But everybody was absolutely disinterested in having the results reproduced in a way, which allowed identification of each separate administrative area! They simply demanded one hundred percent anonymity. This demand was so pronounced that this anonymity had to be guaranteed down to details right from the beginning.

Survey of the complete results

The complete results of the silent-reading tests generally show

- 1) that the students start later on fluent reading than they did earlier.
- 2) If the results in silent reading are compared to those of oral reading the most remarkable fact is that these two very different reading functions go together, but nowadays the students score a little better in silent reading than in oral reading, a change which must be considered an educational gain.

Finally the study concludes

"It is ... documented that students in general (in Denmark) are getting as skilled during the first 7 years of school, as was the case 10 or 20 years ago.

It is also demonstrated that a small group of students is left behind, compared to their fellow class-mates,

especially in spelling, and that this group is a little larger than earlier." (See figure 1 "A").

This fact is explained a.o. by

1: A decreasing number of lessons in Danish: From 1960 to 1974 instruction in Danish within the compulsory instruction was reduced by 32-41 percent in spite of an extension of compulsory education from 7 to 9 years.

2: Today a much larger number of "weak" students are integrated in the ordinary classes than was the case earlier. To this should be added

3 that repeating classes is no longer used as an educational "help". Furthermore, it might be pointed out

4: that the social-educational work has been substantially improved a.o. due to a change of structure in many schools..."

"At the same time the study shows that the best students are getting better skilled than earlier as well in reading as in spelling." (See figure 1 "C").

Behind these positive results lies a.o.

1: that children's and (especially) school libraries have developed rapidly during the last 20 years. Furthermore

2: In many places reading clinics have become resource rooms as regards materials/subjects and methods.

3: Instruction in Danish has become a functional education to a much larger extent than earlier...

"Very shortly may be concluded:

a) Students read much later than earlier.

b) A small group of students apparently cannot keep up with their fellow students in reading and spelling; this group is far from predominant and certainly not predominant in figures, but still it is unmistakable.

c) The best students are getting better in reading than was the case earlier.

d) Especially in reading a considerably larger group nowadays reach considerably better results."

- - -

But it is not sufficient to look at grade 7. What has

happened from grade 2 to grade 7?

This can be shown very schematically - and too schematically - by figure 2, a, b and c, showing the reading development from 1963 and a few years onwards compared to norms of 10 and 20 years earlier:

It may be noticed here that the teacher in grade 2, who is for the first time confronted with these changes in reading habits, may feel like changing his job! - And that the teacher in grade 6, of course, can state contentedly that he or she has done a good job.

Figure 3 showing reading development from about 1970/71 until 1974/75, is easily made - just by changing the name of the class: Thus during this period a pronounced decline took place. The - somewhat strange - two-hunched distribution remained, but generally the tendency was declining.

One should also note that the alarm was not sounded in the beginning of the 1970ies owing to test results. Which might be because we did not have any!

Nor was it school or primarily the teachers, who sounded the alarm; it was the parents and partly the teachers.

The reactions against the lower level, which was clearly seen in Danish during these years, probably was amplified under the influence of the 'back-to-basic-movement', which slowly appeared in Denmark as well. But the parents' reactions also were strong, because there was a quite matter-of-fact reason for it. It simply was getting poorer.

When at the same time school politicians in 1974-76 were under heavy fire because of the new school act, a political agreement was obtained in 1975 aiming at supporting the teaching of Danish. This was practically the only thing, on which the 10 parties of the 11 seated in the Danish Folketing, could agree - - -

Now this support is on its way. Little by little we can catch a glimpse of it. Up till now it is only visible in grade 2 and 3 - and only in those administrative areas, which first started tackling the problems.

But we are on the right path, although we have a long way to go. It took something like ten years to cut the number of lessons. It will be a long time, until it is back in its old place.

And here a remark in passing:

Why couldn't we sound the alarm via tests? Why do we not possess more and better tests? - moreover in a country, which is considered relatively civilized as regards school matters?

Some of us would be of the opinion that that is why we can be mentioned as civilized in these respects.

A better answer may be, that we staked more on the fact that teachers must know each separate student through quite many years - than on the fact that the teacher should be acquainted with some international standard:

We have a classroom teacher system, where the teacher of Danish is one of those few, who receive the students in grade 1 (when the student is 6 or 7 years old). Now this classroom teacher follows his class for 5 or 7 years, maybe for 8 or 9, or even 10 years.

This means that occasionally we might wish for teachers, who were more competent in Danish as a subject.

Personally I believe that it is more essential that teachers are competent in knowing each separate child, whom they actually teach. The teacher has a responsibility and feels a responsibility for each separate child. And to the parents the classroom teacher generally speaking is identical with "school".

For the sake of good order it should be mentioned that of course the student has more than one teacher, for instance in mathematics and foreign languages; here the teachers do not change each year either, but the same teacher teaches the student these subjects for maybe 2-3 or 5-7 years.

- - -

Then what has happened within other parts of the language?
- for instance in spelling?

Generally speaking the same development has taken place. The tendency is exactly the same, but in figures 2 and 3 the "C" does not look quite as good as was the case in reading.

2) Why did it happen?

From about 1958-60 the teaching of beginners in Denmark was revised. Still greater importance was attached to a slow start - and it should be noticed that we do not start reading instruction until the age of 6 or 7.

Nor is there any doubt that reading classes and reading groups (and later on reading clinics) have had much influence, being small local resource centres - as well as far as attitudes towards students are concerned as concerning teaching methods and -materials.

If we look concretely at figure 2, A, grade 2, this will reflect the slow start. It would not be possible, if the teacher did not know the students (and their homes!), and if the homes did not have confidence in the teacher.

At A in the corresponding figure for grades 4 and 5 is reflected the individual work in reading. Here the influence of the school library and to some extent the children's library is seen. Much more literature than the old primer is now included, and also the interest of the homes is reflected.

The A in grades 6 and 7 probably indicates that a great deal of the students have learned to use their reading functionally: Not only are they technically capable of reading, they read!

And a few comments to C in figure 2: Why did not this take the teachers aback?

The teacher may have thought that "really it is a matter of course that there are so many good students in my class" - considering the good teacher, they have had for so many years.

The A many teachers experienced and still experience as

a very great problem - "even thinking of the homes, which send their children to this school!"

The realities around B probably are a.o. that when middle groups disappear, problems occur. This is true not only here.

3) Knowledge may also be obtained from the library

This was, how reading development could be viewed via reading tests

- and as by the way it was experienced by quite many teachers, who commented concurrently the development of their classes.

However, there are also quite different ways of viewing a reading development. This is one of them:

About 18 years ago - in 1960 - the children were a reading group in Denmark. Of our 5 million inhabitants half a million were children, who took out a little more than 10 million books from the libraries.

As a teacher in 1960 I said:

"This is a very good and valuable final result.

We have succeeded!

Your children read. They are literate!" (Figure 4)

And the parents said:

"More than 20 books a year - a book every fortnight except during the summer holidays. This is fine!"

Today the same number of students take out about 50 million books from the libraries - a little more than a hundred books a year - and they read most of the books.

Neither the children's nor the adults' curve include the books, which are bought from booksellers and book-clubs. This is mentioned just for the sake of good order.

Today a child, who is reading only a few books a year is functioning as a kind of reading retarded.

The number of pupils is mainly the same during the entire period, but of course it is impossible to compare without any further ceremony the approximately 10 millions books lent in 1960 to the just above 50 millions lent in 1977.

There probably is a tendency to having more thin books in the school library than was the case earlier. But this is far from a sufficient explanation of these huge changes in numbers.

One might view a development in relation to the accumulation of better readers, which took place through grades 3 - 7, compare figures 2 and 3. It is no longer

a small group of "book-worms" at C, who solely accounts for reading of many books. Also the average readers read quite a lot of books - and use many books.

The teachers in Danish - as mentioned before - at any rate teach more individually than they did earlier - this means something to the number of books. Also part of the teaching of science is more individualized than was the case earlier.

But by the way reading is something else - something more - than it was a generation ago. This I shall also refer to in the next item.

4) Society was different
- and will become different?

In 1937 we had an educational system, which looked as shown in figure 5.

Considering the very well elaborated, independent teaching of adults, for which we have even many decades of tradition in Denmark, one may take the liberty to draw a connecting line from A to B. Thus in 1937 we had an educational system looking like a rectangle with a small triangular superstructure.

In 1977 society looks as shown in figure 6. Now the basis has grown more solid, and the superstructure grows as well in width as in height. We are on our way towards a more quadrangular educational system.

Why this change?

The change in the objective of educations, which is characterized by the change from a pyramidal into a quadrangular system of education, is taking place out of consideration for the children's and young people's (1) later working and professional life. But not exclusively out of consideration for that.

It is made out of consideration for (2) their sparetime activities, (3) their family life, and (4) their social life.

Now that school has widened its demands trying to change from a primarily specifically professionally aimed school into a wider school, - a long-term process has been started.

It is very far from something, which has been carried through (and not at all!) completely...

At any rate it is absolutely essential to stick to the fact that it is not solely out of consideration for the economic life that society makes larger reading demands. The 'three other lives' also need to a high degree more and still more good and still better readers.

The aim of reading instruction has changed!

As one example I shall allow myself, at an international convention like this one, to point out the fact that reading is decidedly not reading one language (that is reading the mothertongue). Reading in more than one language has become a necessity. One is downright handicapped, if one is capable only of functioning within the way of thinking of one's own language area.

But by the way, in quite different ways and - I think! - in all languages reading has become something different and more complex than earlier. This is being discussed in this very moment in another meeting, in which Dr. Theodore Harris is presenting the Ira Dictionary Project.

Here I shall just say as a reminder that I consider the concept of reading changeable, dynamic -

Reading is not, what it was once.

5) "Now, what can we learn from that story?"

That question was asked in the old primers of my own country, whenever a moralizing story had come to an end.

And that question I dare not answer at all!

My personal impression is that we can establish a research on, what is going on now in the 1970ies . When we are doing this, it is best not to be too much dependent on, what was going on in th 20ies!

So extraordinarily quick changes are taking place that our own world as children is indeed a world of yesterday.

"It was at that time, when you paid in stones - or was it shell ?" my own boys were suggesting, if I happened to compare to my own childhood.

And in many ways they were right.

In my country my childhood was the years long before plastic and ballpens.

I didn't know, what nylon was. We had never heard about tape - I don't remember in which way we taped our world together. Maybe it was smaller.

We had never hear about The Third - or Fourth World, or television or transistor radios. Nor of jet-planes or nuclear energy or ecology movements.

We had libraries - mostly for the adults; I remember, when the first school library was opened with serious books, not comics and definitely not easy-to-read books.

It was at a time, when no teacher knew the word integration, and when reading retarded students were stupid.

It was the good old days - - -

- - -

I have now brought forward a few facts on what we have been able to observe in a tiny language area. It can be easily surveyed.

It is essential for me to emphasize that it is not my job to tell others, what to do.

This was information - and nothing but that.

And in order not to be misunderstood I shall emphasize that I am not standing here to sell ideas.

There are people, who are always wondering, which problems they can solve for other people. There are probably many, especially teachers, who professionally are so accustomed to this, that they have a hard job not doing it over and over again.

It might be more useful occasionally to find out whether - and how - these many others already had solved problems, which resemble those we ourselves are struggling with?

Probably we can learn from other countries; personally I believe that we could learn much more from others than we do.

If we do, we do it reluctantly; to me it looks like each country wants to make its own mistakes. And moreover we boast - separately - that "fortunately we make these mistakes ourselves!"

As just one example I might mention that we in Denmark were practically unprepared, when the educational problems of the guest workers' children became urgent.

We might have learned from Sweden - or from the far more extended experience obtained by West Germany. We might have learned even more from Luxembourg, which has even more and much older experience. We might have learned from many other countries.

Another example:

In the United States is worked much with many kinds of teaching of foreign languages. I have seen many programmes, for instance on 'Spanish/English'.

To me it does not look, as if one has drawn especially systematically on those several hundred years of experience in these problems, which exists in other parts of the world.

We can learn from history, but we don't do it

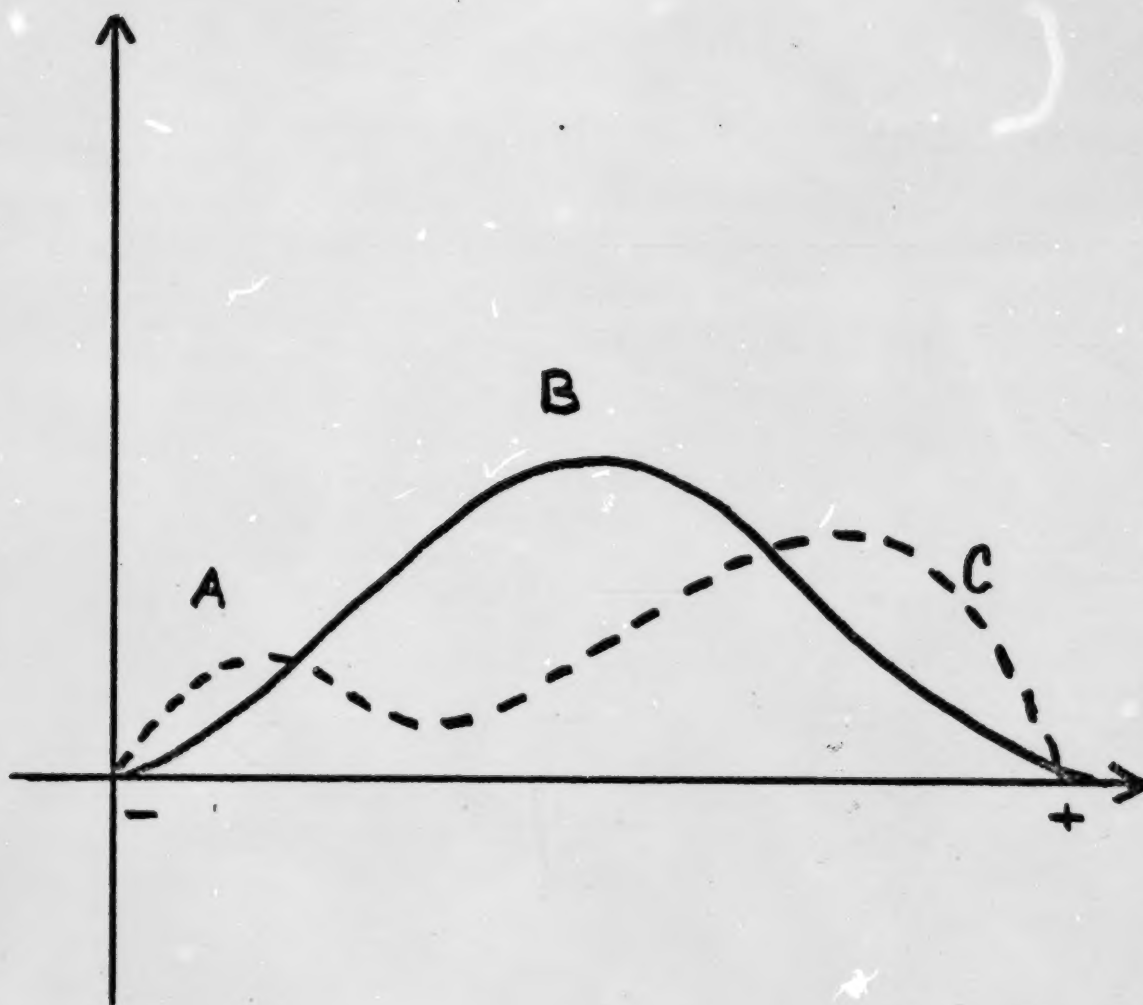
If we did, at least my generation would have had wings and belonged to a better world than the one we are living in now.

Probably we cannot learn much from each other.

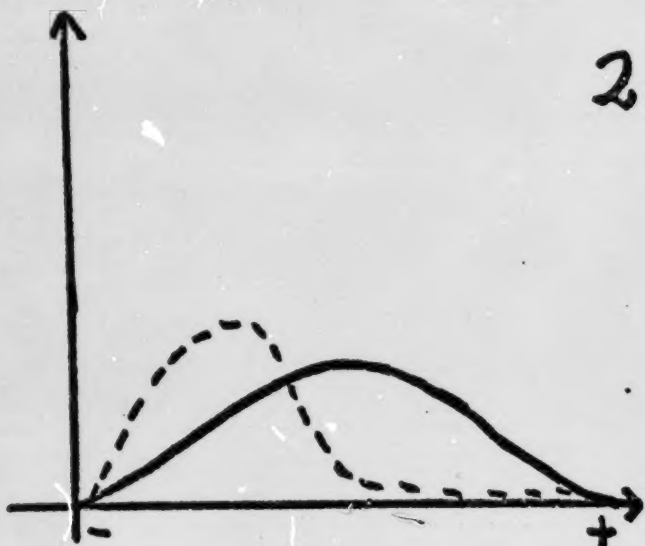
But apart from that I don't find that we are
overworking ourselves in trying.

mogens jansen

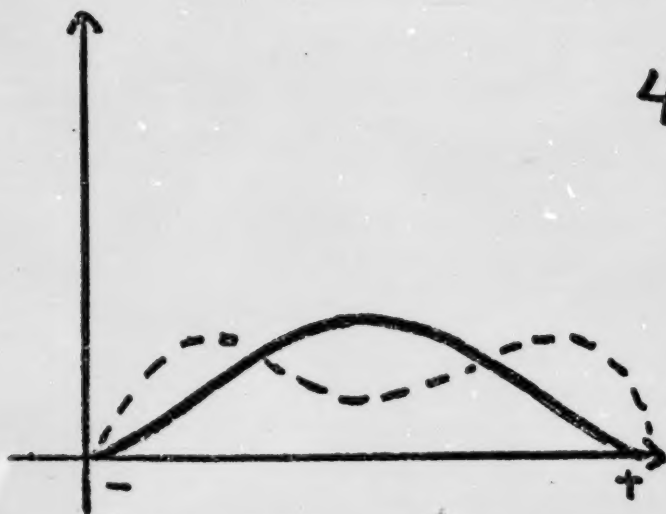
1



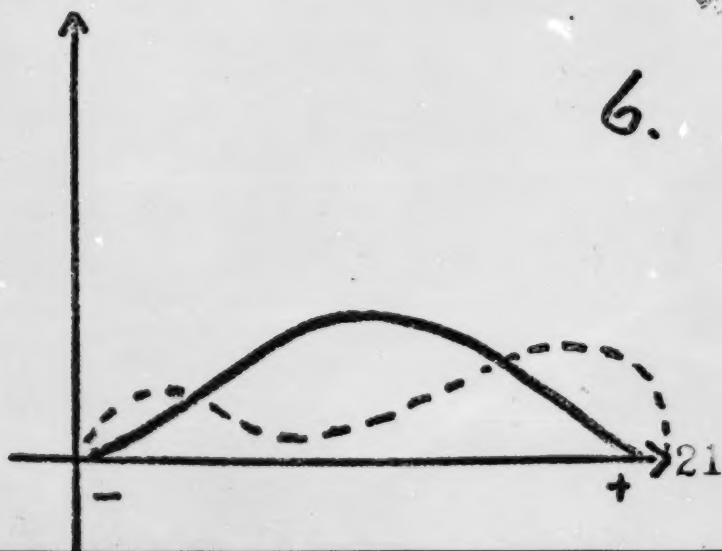
2.

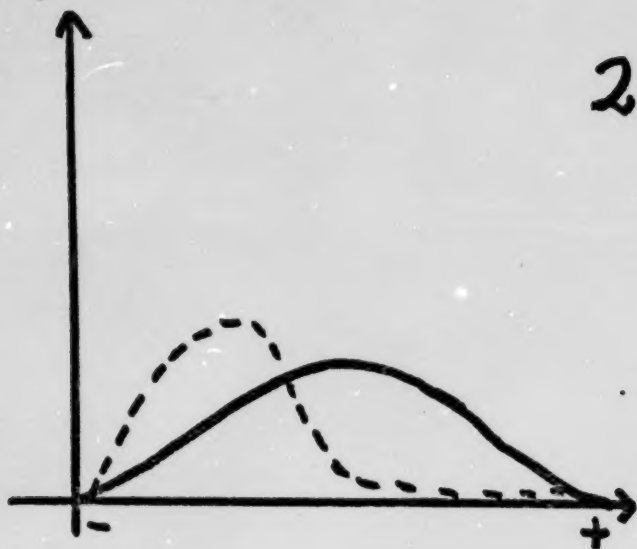
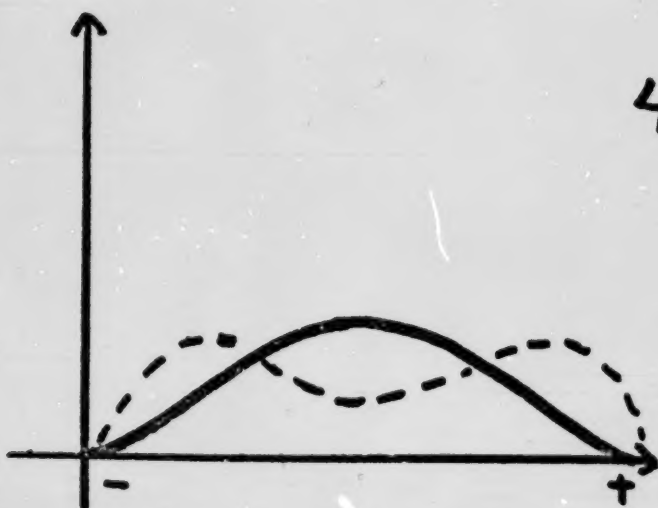
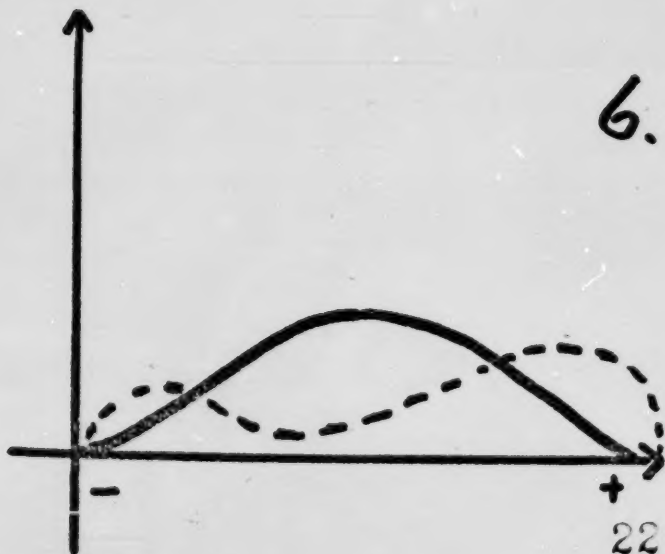


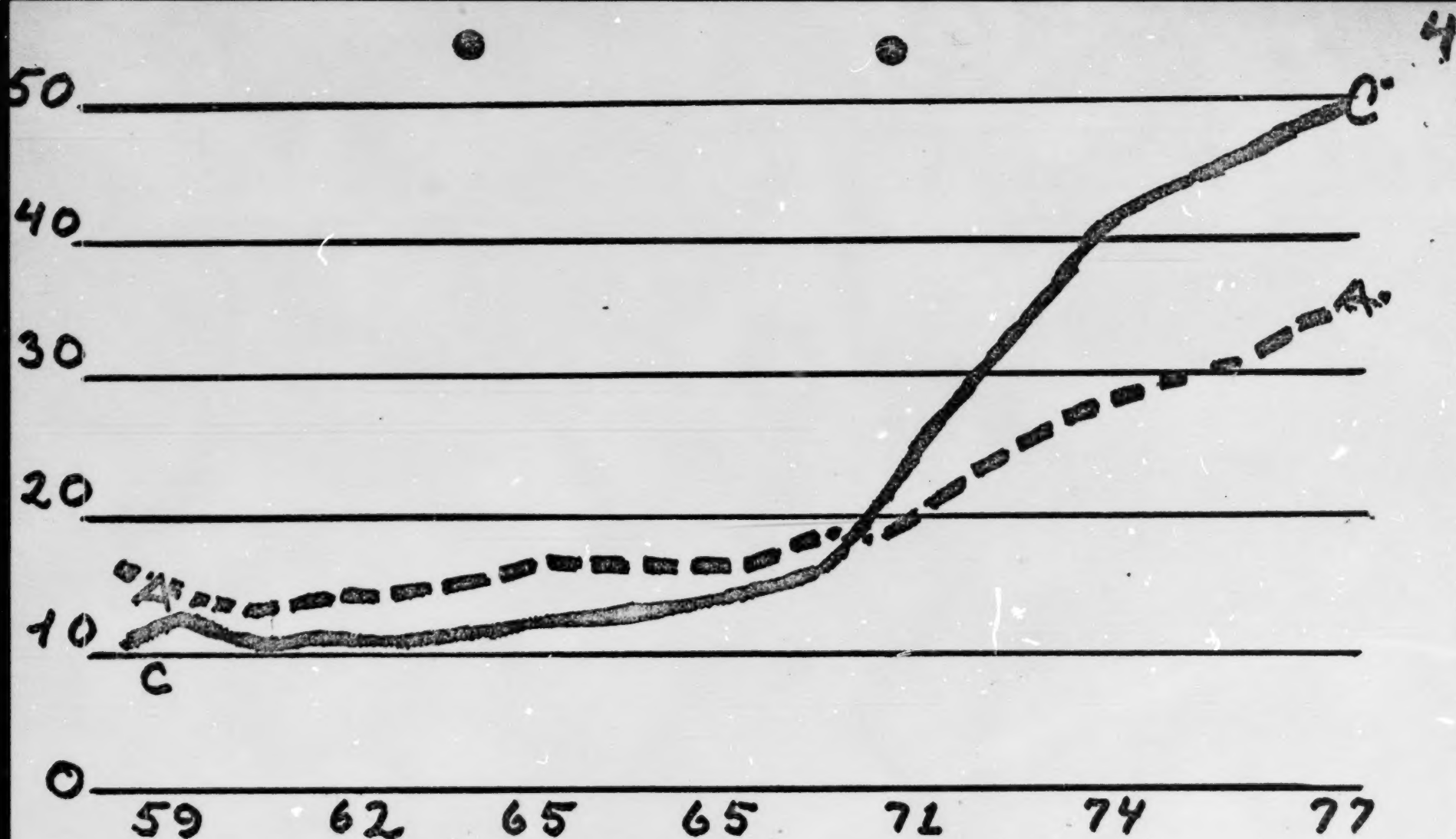
4.



6.



$2. \rightarrow 3.$  $4. \rightarrow (4.) - 5.$  $6. \rightarrow 6.-7.$ 



5